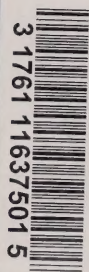


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NEPTUNE FOOD SERVICES

Computer Technology Helps Distributor Manage Growth



Neptune Food Services has long recognized the benefits of computerization. In fact, the company's success in providing reliable and affordable distribution services over a large geographical area is due in part to its decision to automate certain fleet management functions.

About the company

Neptune Food Services is a division of SERCA Food-service Inc., one of the Oshawa Group of Companies. Neptune distributes food products throughout the lower mainland of British Columbia, in the Kamloops and Okanagan region and as far north as Prince George. The company's fleet of 44 tractors, 13 straight trucks and 61 trailers travel more than 1.5 million kilometres per year.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Neptune launched a series of progressive initiatives designed to streamline its distribution operations. This effort, which is ongoing today, has helped the company cope effectively with a significant increase in business volume.

service

Route optimization software

Neptune's first major fleet management initiative was undertaken in 1985, when the company replaced its manual system for planning delivery routes with a computerized route optimization program. The objective was to improve customer service by reducing delivery times and the total distance travelled by company vehicles.

The decision proved to be a timely one, as implementation of the routing software occurred just as Neptune's "base business went through the roof," says Shane Mason, one of the company's three fleet supervisors. According to Mr. Mason, the software identified routing efficiencies that proved to be crucial to Neptune's ability to manage its business growth.

Neptune has invested more than \$100,000 in the routing system, including the cost of various upgrades that have been installed over the years. Nevertheless, if the company's record of stable growth is any indication, it has been money well spent.

On-board computers monitor driving and delivery times

More recently, Neptune Food Services further computerized its fleet by installing an on-board vehicle and delivery monitoring system, at a cost of more than \$200,000.

In-house driver training

Neptune Food Service's computerization initiatives have been complemented by an equally strong commitment to driver training.

All new company drivers are required to take an in-house training course that focuses on basic driving skills, safety, progressive shifting and speeding.

**"We can train a driver
from scratch," says
Neptune Fleet Super-
visor Shane Mason,
"and we've demonstrat-
ed that capability on a
number of occasions."**

To date, the system has been used primarily to monitor idling times on a vehicle-by-vehicle basis, as well as service times and driver performance. When a vehicle idles for more than one minute at a time, the system automatically produces an "exception report." By bringing infractions to drivers' attention, Neptune Food Services has been able to reduce fleet-wide idling from 20 per cent of running time to about 7 per cent, thereby minimizing the unproductive use of fuel.

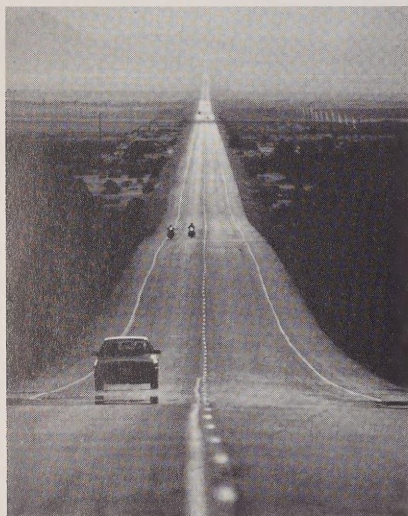
Neptune is now exploring other ways to use its computers to improve customer service, enhance the fleet's productivity and save money. Specifically, the company is endeavouring to reduce the number of deliveries made to individual customers and the length of time trucks spend at customers' loading docks.

According to Mr. Mason, this means getting the routing system and the on-board system to "talk to each other." To achieve this, the on-board system is now also being used to monitor both the time spent driving and the time spent at the dock. This additional information is fed into the routing system, where it becomes one of the factors used to calculate the best routes and the optimum number of visits to different customers.

payback

A team approach to fleet management

Changes in the way the fleet is managed have also played a role in the company's success. The previous approach of having decisions made by a single person has given way to a more effective team-oriented approach. The Neptune Transportation Management Team is now composed of the three fleet supervisors and a driver trainer, who work together in addressing the challenges and opportunities of running a modern fleet operation.



For more information on
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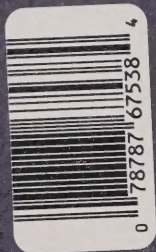
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